



Farm to School: Policy Assessment Memo

Increasing Farm to School Programs: Why Take Action?

Childhood obesity rates have tripled over the past 30 years. The Bogalusa Heart Study, a long term study of over 16,000 people showed that 77% of obese children remain obese as adults, while only 7% of healthy weight children became obese. With stakes so high for our kids, we need to help them develop good eating habits early in life so that they become healthy adults. That means eating and exposure to more fresh fruits and vegetables.

Farm to school connects schools (K-12) and early care education settings (often sub-categorized as Farm to Preschool) with local food producers with the objectives of serving local, healthy food in school cafeterias; improving student nutrition; providing agriculture, health and nutrition education opportunities; and supporting local and regional farmers.

Schools with farm to school programs participate in activities such as purchasing locally and regionally grown food; featuring farm-fresh foods on their menus; incorporating nutrition and agriculture-based curriculum; and providing students experiential learning opportunities through farm visits, school gardens, taste-tests, composting and more.

With Wisconsin's vast agricultural resources there are many opportunities to develop farm to school programs that benefit:

- Students – By teaching them about food sources, exposing them to new foods and including more fresh fruits and vegetables in their school lunches.
- Schools – As the quality of lunches improves so does the demand. More kids eating healthier is not only a win for health, but often the increased demand helps improve the bottom line for the lunch program.
- Farmers – New markets for their products and the chance to raise their profile and share their knowledge with local kids makes everyone a winner.
- Local economy – Sourcing your food from local farms helps keep the money in your community, where the economic benefits are magnified.



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Changing Policies to Encourage Farm to School Program Development

In order to encourage the growth of farm to school initiatives many school districts are looking for some “best practices” model to guide their efforts. Policy changes help create an environment where these programs can become ongoing, sustainable efforts that have a better chance of long term success and are strongly encouraged.

The following model language was developed as part of the Transform Wisconsin Project, funded by a Community Transformation Grant (CTG) from the Centers for Disease Control. Under these grants 30 Wisconsin communities worked to advance solutions for better health where we live, learn work and play. These solutions focused on the areas of active communities, food systems and tobacco-free living.

The model policy language below is the product of a collaborative effort between Transform Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Association of School Boards.

Transform Wisconsin and Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Inc. Model Policy Language: Farm to School

Cooperative Purchasing Policy:

“The school district supports the integration of a farm to school program into the school food program and curricular and extracurricular activities as appropriate to facilitate the nutritional and educational goals of the school district. Farm to school programs enhance the nutritional and educational experiences of school children by providing nutritious and fresh or minimally processed, locally grown food as part of the school food program. The Board encourages the District’s staff to explore opportunities to partner with neighboring school districts and other institutions (hospitals, higher education, etc.) to use cooperative purchasing arrangements to increase the amount of locally-produced food that is purchased from farms and vendors.”



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Food Service Policy and/or Purchasing Policy:

“The Board supports the integration of a farm to school program within the school food program and within the District’s curricular and extracurricular programs to facilitate the nutritional and educational goals of the school district. Farm to school programs enhance the nutritional and educational experiences of school children by providing nutritious and fresh or minimally processed, locally grown food as part of the school food program. A farm to school program may also involve providing complementary educational activities to students that emphasize food, farming, and nutrition. The Board encourages the District’s staff to (1) explore opportunities to increase the amount of locally-produced food that is procured in connection with the school food program, including the use of geographic preferences to the extent consistent with applicable state and federal procurement regulations; (2) take advantage of state and federal training opportunities and technical assistance related to farm to school programs, and (3) explore opportunities related to possible grants or other funding sources for expenses associated with a farm to school program.”

A note about “local”:

“Schools have the authority to define “local” however they choose, and definitions vary widely depending on the unique geography and climate where the school is located, and on the abundance of local food producers in their area. There are many options for how schools can define local including geographic region, state, county, or miles from the school. Some schools may even have different definitions of local depending on the season or the type of product they are purchasing. A tiered definition of “local” might also be relevant for schools purchasing many different local products at different times of the year.”

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